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ABSTRACT

Part of a larger investigation of the rhetorical character of the presidencies of Harry Truman through Jimmy Carter, this report concentrates on the presidents' linguistic styles and their semantic choices. The first half of the report discusses the background of the study and the development of a computerized language analysis technique--DICTION--and describes the selection of 266 rhetorical samples from the seven presidents and a comparison sample of 339 speeches delivered by corporation executives, social activists, political candidates, and religious leaders. In the second half of the report, the personal aspects of each president's linguistic style are first summarized, then analyzed developmentally through their years in office and situationally according to their political party, topic, and audience. Preliminary findings reported are that (1) presidential discourse is a somewhat unique rhetorical entity, (2) individual presidents vary considerably from one another on the dimensions studied, and (3) some presidents alter their linguistic styles to accommodate changes in time or rhetorical circumstances, while the linguistic style of others is more habitual. Comparisons of the data are presented in four tables. (AEA)

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SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL MESSAGES:

THE STATE OF THE PRESIDENCY

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SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL MESSAGES:

THE STATE OF THE PRESIDENCY

The president of the United States is many things to many people. To the political scientist, the president is the manager of a bewilderingly vast bureaucracy which wields economic and political power. To the historian, the president is an individual social actor who uses the presidency to make his unique philosophical mark on the world of his contemporaries. To the political psychologist, the president is frequently viewed as a psyche writ large, an intricate combination of public and private man. To the communication scholar, the president is one whose ability to govern is a function of his ability to persaude his national constituency, to use effectively the symbolic resources of political office. For the communication scholar, the presidency is best understood by examining the public statements and media events which help him to play well, or not so well, in all of those Peorias he must govern.

For the past several years, I have been gathering information about the rhetorical dimensions of the American presidency. My research has introduced me to a host of questions about presidential communication which have gone unanswered until now. Among the things we do not yet know are: How often and in what contexts do our presidents speak? About which topics do they typically discourse? When, where and why do they choose to speak? More complex questions also beckon: How do the quantity and quality of a president's speechmaking affect his political standing? What cultural motifs and ideological underpinnings can be discerned in a president's popular discourse? What verbal peculiarities can be found in the talk of a given president and how do these peculiarities affect the institution of the presidency itself? Although the public speeches of an American president are oftentimes embarrassingly prosaic and even though their artifice may seem transparent at times, popular presidential discourse has locked within it important clues about

the people who listen to and sometimes appreciate it. To study presidential speeches is to study the American people themselves.

The study to be reported here is part of a larger investigation in which I am currently engaged. My general purpose has been to make a comprehensive statement about the rhetorical character of the modern presidency. This research has concentrated exclusively on the presidencies of Harry Truman through Jimmy Carter and has had three main foci: (1) Rhetorical attitudes--When we talk, we do something more than make discrete noises. Our communicative behavior emenates from a complex network of attitudes about the very act of speaking itself: When should I talk? How should I talk? Is it right to talk at all? Presidents, too, possess interesting attitudes toward encoding spoken messages. By carefully inspecting presidential biographies, autobiographical writings, archival notes and the like, I have been attempting to determine how much pleasure or pain, excitement or drudgery public speaking has produced in our most recent presidents. These attitudes have varied greatly among our presidents and appear to be associated with their political world-views and with their psychological make-ups as well. (2) Rhetorical habits--Here, I am attempting to complete a communicative history of the modern presidency by constructing a day-by-day diary of presidential speechmaking. Using the Public Papers of the President as a data base, I have noted the date, place, topic, order of occurrence, audience and situation of each of the more than eight thousand presidential speeches delivered during the last thirty-five years. These data are being incorporated into a computer data bank and will eventually be made available to the scholarly community. (3) Rhetorical styles--This third phase of my research, much of which will be reported in this paper, has concentrated on the semantic choices characteristically made by these seven presidents. I have selected a broad sampling of speeches for analysis, subjected each to a computerized content analytic procedure,

and attempted to explain the resulting rhetorical patterns by making recourse to what is known about the personal and institutional forces surrounding the modern presidency. Before examining these data, let us look briefly at presidential communication as an area of study.

Background

One of the most oft-quoted statements in the literature surrounding the presidency is Richard Neustadt's (1976) reminder that the ultimate power wielded by a president lies in his power to persuade. Although it may be a bit reductionistic to claim that the nation's Chief Executive is little more than its Chief Persuader, recent American history sometimes seems little more than a pastiche of memorable presidential utterances: fireside chats, whistle-stopping, folksy press conferences, asking what might be done for one's country, rose garden ceremonies, elaborate watergatian denials and pardons and, currently, moral crises in the field of energy. When we think of our presidents at all, we most often think of them on their feet and talking. Thus, to dismiss presidential speech-making as just so much puffery and to concentrate exclusively on the byzantine machinations transpiring behind closed doors in the White House is to deny the essentially public nature of the presidency. Richard Neustadt knew, as most of us know, that all plots hatched behind closed doors must eventually be carried off on the most public stage the nation possesses. A president is first and foremost a talker. He may do other things too but he does few of them well unless he does them persuasively.

The perspective on the presidency assumed in this paper, therefore, is a rhetorical one. Among other things, a rhetorical perspective on the presidency assumes the following: (1) that the most important decision a modern president makes is not that of deciding policy but that of articulating policy in politically

feasible ways; (2) that anything a president says in public becomes important--both wheat and chaff, both foolish and serious; (3) that presidential messages "do" as well as say, that the making of a presidential speech in Topeka--regardless of what is said--constitutes powerful social action; (4) that even the most authoritatively worded presidential directive is impotent unless the president can convince the people that he has the power to carry out the directive and unless he can convince the press that he can convince the people; (5) that even the most existential event (say, a communist invasion) is denied essential meaning until the chief executive speaks that event in ways that can call his people to action; and (6) that the voter's evaluations of individual presidents are, often, rhetorically based. We warm to the gentle pleadings of a war-time Roosevelt, relax our guards in the presence of an Eisenhower, think uncommonly large thoughts or dream immodestly large dreams when seated in the audience of a Kennedy or a Johnson. When we find a Richard Nixon too slick or a Gerry Ford too inelegant or a Jimmy Carter too indirect, we are making rhetorical judgements too, judgements which sometimes foreshadow political reactions as well.

Communication-based studies of the presidency are now in their infancy but hold considerable promise, perhaps because the advent of the mass media (and the super-rhetoricalization of the presidency it implies) now makes it possible for an artful chief executive to work his will with the people in the most direct manner imaginable. Several different types of scholarly inquiry have been conducted in the general area of presidential communication: (1) Historical studies--these are primarily case studies of individual speech events which proved to be unusually influential on the political environment. Studies by Jablonski (1979), Gregg and Hauser (1973), King (1976), Newman (1975), Patton (1977) and Stelzner (1971), to mention but a few, have examined the rhetorical triumphs and disasters of some of our most recent presidents. (2) Generic studies--numerous scholars have become

interested in those types of speaking situations which recur frequently in the life of a modern president and in how different chief executives have reacted to roughly equivalent communicative events. Hart (1977) has studied political ceremonies, Wolfarth (1961) inaugural addresses, Smith et. al. (1966) nominating speeches, Ivie (1974) war-time speaking, Prothro (1965) states of the union messages, while countless others have examined presidential campaigning (see, for example, Kaid, et. al., 1974). (3) Psychological Studies--some researchers have attempted long-term analyses of a given president's communicative behavior so as to understand the psychological reactions engendered in the populace by that president. Donley and Winter (1970), Dovring (1975), Kessel (1974), Hart (1976), Sigelman and Miller (1978), Shneidman (1972), Carpenter and Jordan (1978) and Frank (1973) have all done systematic analyses of presidential messages and related their findings to the presumed psychological tendencies of the presidents studied.

While each of the foregoing studies has made its contribution, few have been animated by a distinctive concern for the institutional forces surrounding the presidency. Although these researchers have used presidential talk as a convenient data base, their theoretical commitments lay in other areas (typically, in the area of communication theory per se). Presidential scholars, on the other hand, have generally paid little systematic attention to rhetorical matters, their primary interests lying in the direction of (1) individual personalities, (2) bureaucratic operations in the office of the presidency, (3) governmental checks and balances on the president, (4) policy-making and policy-monitoring and, most recently, (5) relationships with the Fourth Estate. Occasionally, of course, historians or political scientists like James David Barber (1968) have provided us with brilliant rhetorical profiles of certain presidents but such analyses have been few and far between.

Focus of Research

In a recent and thoughtful review of research on the presidency, William Spracher (1979) has suggested that scholars should increase their focus on the (1) institutionalization, (2) legitimacy and (3) accountability of the presidency. In my study, I shall touch upon the first two areas mentioned by Spracher for my interest is in determining the rhetorical character of the modern presidency--that is, how modern presidents have sought to establish and maintain their legitimacy as political leaders and how their attempts to do so have been constrained by the office they hold. While I shall, necessarily, only partially venture into this complex area, I shall ask certain basic research questions:

1. What is the general rhetorical character of presidential discourse? When compared to other types of public communication, do presidential messages have a unique flavor, a flavor presumably resulting from the inherent, institutional forces with which all presidents must contend?

2. What individual rhetorical variations can be found within the public discourse of recent presidents? What, if any, distinctive patterns result when presidents Truman through Carter are compared and might such patterns be a function of the psychological environments surrounding their various presidencies?

3. What differences occur across time in the communicative behavior of individual presidents? Has the rhetorical character of the presidency changed in recent years? Do individual presidents change their behaviors as a result of events which occur as their presidencies unfold?

4. What sorts of rhetorical accommodations are forced upon the president as he seeks to deal with a variety of social and political circumstances? How "adjustable" are our presidents and do they systematically vary their spoken remarks across a variety of rhetorical situations?

While these research questions are necessarily primitive, answers to them might well be worth having. If it is true that presidential popularity, national *espirit de corps*, domestic programs and international attitudes are increasingly becoming a function of how the nation's leader comports himself, then carefully

examining what a president says and, more important, how he says it, may be worthwhile indeed. In recent years it has become possible to conceive of a corrupt president, or an inept president or a truculent president but it is not yet possible to imagine a quiet president.

Overall Method

To answer such research questions, I have selected the general method of content analysis. The content analytic system employed here has been designed expressly for this study. Although many different analytical schemes have been used before by scholars in political communication, few such approaches have been inspired by the scholarly literature surrounding the American presidency itself. I have attempted to operationalize here some of the more popular constructs used by researchers when discussing the psychological concomitants of being the Chief Executive of the United States.

Even a cursory examination of such literature will reveal that relatively few concepts have been used to distinguish among the socio-psychological environments of individual presidencies. Works on the presidency by Barber (1977), Rossiter (1960), Neustadt (1976), Kearns (1976), Wildavsky (1975), Mazlish and Diamond (1979), Buchanan (1978) and Novak (1974)collectively imply that four basic questions must be answered before a given presidency can be understood: (1) How does the president use power, when and why does he do so, and does he cope well when power is denied him? (2) How doctrinaire is the president, how well-formed and insistent is his political vision and how capable is he of translating that dream into concrete reality? (3) How dynamic is the presidency in question, how much momentum does the president attempt to generate and how capable is he of thinking reflectively about alternative courses of action? (4) What sort of emotional resilience does the president have, is he capable of

imparting that resilience to his followers and can he withstand the debilitating onslaughts of everyday political life?

Analytical Procedure

Because in this study I am more interested in understanding public perceptions of the presidency than I am in evaluating its deep-seeded psychological impact on holders of the office, I attempted to operationalize these four constructs in such a way that public information would be afforded. Accordingly, I developed a computerized language-analysis technique, Program DICTION, which measures, in effect, the power, dynamism, resilience and doctrinal overtones of the passages it processes. DICTION examines a given verbal text for its relative dependence upon certain lists of words (or "dictionaries"); it is a context-blind program concerned only with linguistic frequency, not with how or when a particular word is used. The fundamental assumption upon which such a program operates is that with a sufficiently large and carefully stratified language sample, important information about a speaker and his communicative circumstances will be forthcoming. Although context-blind programs are, necessarily, of limited use for understanding the subtle rhetorical dynamics of an individual message, they often shed light on a speaker's overall rhetorical style or on a given universe of discourse.

DICTION operates in the following manner: after the researcher has converted a verbal passage into machine-readable form (usually, by keypunching), the program analyzes the first five hundred words it encounters by calculating character statistics, determining words of unusually high frequency, computing dictionary totals for twenty-seven different word lists, and then providing a normative profile of the passage in question. DICTION's search corpus consists of approximately 1750 words which have been used to process roughly 1,000 verbal samples to date.

Content Categories

After raw frequencies have been produced for the twenty-seven dictionaries, standardized scores are calculated and, through a series of simple equations, four compound style variables are constructed. These variables--activity, positivity, absolutism and realism--correspond to the four psychological dimensions of the presidency mentioned earlier. In each of the four cases, it was determined that certain types of words "contributed" to the construct being tapped and that other words "detracted" from the construct. By standardizing dictionary totals ($\bar{x}$=50, s.d.=5) and by adding (or subtracting) certain constants, each compound variable was made to range from a low score of 0 to a high of 200. Intercorrelations among the four compound variables are negligible (the highest being .16); these variables therefore appear to be tapping quite different portions of the semantic space comprising public messages. Thus, DICTION provides information about the following major concepts and their constituent parts:

ACTIVITY: Statements indicating motion, change, or the implementation ideas.

+ Aggressiveness: Words indicating assertiveness or competition (e.g. fight, attack, dominate, reject)
+ Definitiveness: Connotations of movement or completion of a task (e.g. deliver, march, push, start)
+ Communicativeness: Reference to social interaction (e.g. advise, complain, recommend, urge)
- Intellectualism: Remarks about cerebral, reflective processes (e.g. believe, decide, interpret, solve)
- Passivity: Words implying lack of motor of psychic activity (e.g. accept, hesitant, patient, quiet)
- Embellishment: A selective ratio of adjectives to verbs based, in part, on Boder's (1940) conceptualization that heavy use of adjectival constructions "slows down" a verbal passage.

POSITIVITY: Statements endorsing someone or something or offering positive descriptions.

+ Praise: Verbal affirmations of some person or idea (e.g. beautiful, good, loyal, sweet)
+ Enjoyment: Words normally associated with a positive affective state (e.g. cheerful, comfortable, exciting, secure)
+ Inspiration: Abstract virtues deserving of universal respect (e.g. brotherhood, courage, freedom, trust)

- Deprivation: Reference to negative feelings or dangerous events (e.g. anxious, conflict, despair, illegal)
- Negation: Verbal constructions which function to deny (e.g. aren't, cannot, neither, wouldn't)

ABSOLUTISM: Statements indicating resoluteness, inflexibility and completeness.

+ Rigidity: Treats all forms of the verb "to be" as indicators of complete certainty (e.g. am, are, was, will)
+ Leveling: Words used to ignore individual differences or distinctiveness (e.g. all, everyone, none, only)
+ Collectives: Singular nouns connoting plurality which function to decrease specificity (e.g. bureau, department, industry, press)
+ Power Factor: A measure of code restriction; a high P.F. indicates repeated use of a finite number of terms. Calculated by Hart (1976) to be a measure of linguistic "contentedness."
- Numerical Frequency: Any sum, date, or product which serves to specify the facts in a given case. (Includes both numerals and verbal constructions.)
- Qualification: Conditional or ambivalent words which assist a speaker in "stepping away" from a verbalization (e.g. almost, could, might, perhaps)
- Self Awareness: Signals one's refusal to speak ex cathedra and a willingness to acknowledge the limitations of one's opinions. (Includes all first-person pronouns.)
- Lexical Diversity: Johnson's (1946) type-token ratio, which divides total different words by total words. A high TTR indicates a speaker's unwillingness to repeat himself and, presumably, a desire for linguistic precision.

REALISM: Expressions referring to tangible, immediate and practical issues.

+ Simplicity: Consists of Ogden's (1968) "operation" and "direction" words which he calculates to be among the 750 most frequently encountered terms (e.g. down, given, seem, under)
+ Spatial Awareness: Practical words referring to geographical boundaries or physical distances (e.g. city, eastern, nationwide, streets)
+ Temporal Awareness: Terms which fix an event or person within a specific time frame (e.g. day, moment, now, winter)
+ Present Concern: A selected list of present-tense verbs which recur frequently in everyday talk (e.g. becomes, fail, make, tell)
+ Human Interest: An adaptation of Flesch's (1951) notion that a heavy concentration on human beings gives discourse a life-like quality (e.g. child, dad, we, themselves)
+ Concretizing: References to physical objects, sociological or geographical units or natural forces (e.g. building, family, nation, sun)
- Past Concern: Past-tense constructions of the present-tense verbs described above.
- Word Size: A simple measure of the average number of characters-per-word of a given passage. Also borrows Flesch's (1951) notion that linguistic convolutions make it difficult for listeners to extract concrete meaning from a statement.

In this report I shall concentrate on the four compound variables just described. In addition, I shall select six of the sub-variables (i.e. Embellishment, Human Interest, Simplicity, Self-Awareness, Lexical Diversity and Word Size) for special attention, primarily because they have been used in numerous other content analytic efforts and thus might provide comparative insight to interested researchers. Finally, I shall report data about the use of certain BASIC AMERICAN SYMBOLS which often form the rhetorical backbone of political messages. These "God" terms--America, country, democracy, freedom, government, nation, peace, people, law and rights--are often depended upon for special impact by culturally savvy public speakers. In monitoring how frequently these terms are used in presidential discourse and by noting when they are unusually preponderant, we may be afforded novel insight into American political life.

In essence, then, the DICTION program assesses the micro-stylistic choices a speaker makes and presumes that such choices are typically beyond the ken of even canny political rhetors. By attending only to such gross linguistic facts, DICTION obviously misses a good deal of nuance in a verbal passage. However, the DICTION program permits the researcher to examine a wide array of messages in an efficient fashion and allows him or her to inspect an individual speaker's rhetoric in detail (perhaps even pointing up a speaker's epistemological roots). While computerized language analysis cannot itself create insight, its total reliability, its absolute demand for operationalization, and its contextual blindness are all features potentially helpful to one interested especially in aggregate data.

Discourse Sample

Because several different types of research questions have been posed in this study, a number of different rhetorical samples have been analyzed.

They include:

1. Presidential Sample. Thirty-eight speeches were selected for each of the seven presidents being examined here. For each president, nineteen speeches were chosen from the first half of his administration and nineteen from the second half. In all cases, domestic audiences were being addressed although roughly half of the presidential speeches were delivered to national audiences and half to local listeners. A wide range of speaking situations was involved: ceremonies, conferences, campaigning, etc.

   Because speech topic has such a pronounced effect upon public discussion, care was taken to insure that no systematic bias would result from topical differences. The speeches were chosen so as to guarantee rough equivalence among the following topics: (1) Pragmatics--speeches focusing on such tangible problems as the economy, energy, labor, party politics, etc.; (2) Values--speeches detailing the overriding principles and goals of the American people (e.g. freedom, civil rights, national destiny, etc.); (3) Strife--speeches describing domestic and international conflicts such as Vietnam, the Middle East, nuclear disarmament, etc. Thus, the presidential sample in this study consisted of 266 speeches chosen in such a way that direct comparisons could be made among the seven chief executives being studied.

2. Comparison Sample. To obtain some understanding of the possible generic features of presidential discourse, a sample of speeches was drawn and subjected to the analytical procedures described earlier. This comparison sample consisted of four blocks of discourse produced by: (1) Corporation executives--fifty speeches delivered at industrial conferences by the heads of major American companies. Topics varied here but normally dealt with such broad-based questions as governmental regulation, social responsibility, economic fluctuations, etc. (2) Social Activists--included in this sample were fifty speeches by prominent leaders of minority causes. Speakers such as Jesse Jackson, Kate Millett, William Kunstler, Robert Welch and Ralph Nader were featured in this sample and the topics they addressed were highly diverse. (3) Political Candidates--those persons who ran for, but failed to reach, the White House since 1948 comprised this sub-sample. The speeches examined were all campaign speeches and addressed the broad range of topics typically found in a presidential campaign. 129 speeches were included here. (4) Religious Leaders--this was a sample of 160 messages delivered by both nationally known and quite obscure prelates. Eight different denominations were equally represented in this grouping and the subjects with which they dealt ranged from social and financial issues to the theological role of the contemporary church.

   The comparison sample, then, consisted of 389 messages prepared and delivered by speakers of widely varying predilections. All speeches in the comparison sample were delivered to American audiences between 1945 and 1975. It is hoped that this sample represents--collectively--the universe of issues about which contemporary, public persons discourse.

3. Other Samples. Eventually, it is my hope to trace the developmental effects produced in rhetorical style by the constraints of the presidency. Currently, I am approaching that goal in three major ways: (1) Nixon sample--to obtain some notion of how the office of the presidency affects its occupants' language, 29 speeches delivered by Richard Nixon while serving as vice-president have been compared to 38 he presented while occupying the White House. The topics, audiences and rhetorical circumstances found in the two samples were similar. (2) Carter sample--I am analyzing the presidential speaking of Jimmy Carter on a year-by-year basis. Presently, I have completed an analysis of his first two years in office. 38 speeches from each year have been chosen for study and topical and situational effects have been minimized in the sample drawn. (3) Johnson sample--although this portion of the study is not yet completed, 60 speeches delivered on the topic of education by Lyndon Johnson over the course of his lifetime are being examined. My hope is to separate those features of rhetorical style which may be native to the office of the presidency from those which are peculiar to the individual himself. The speeches selected for study were presented between 1938 and 1968.

   In each of the above cases, I am attempting to discover changes over time in rhetorical behavior which might be attributed to the stresses and strains of being president of the United States. Since micro-stylistic features of human communication are often highly idiosyncratic, it is entirely possible that no institutional or developmental effects will be observed or that if effects are observed that they will be differentially manifested by the presidents selected here for special study. Alternatively, there may be something "presidential" about how our presidents talk.

Because it is a public, as well as a political entity, presidential discourse must be approached with caution. One must be extraordinarily careful about generalizing from rhetorical phenomena observed to the psychological or philosophical states which may have inspired them. I make no claim here that the samples described above will permit me to know the essential Jimmy Carter or John Kennedy. Although micro-stylistic data are instructive, they often emerge from the complex, highly calculative "rhetorical machines" which manufacture presidential messages. Thus, our concern should be to understand the public projection known as Jimmy Carter and not to presume that any sort of public behavior easily reveals private states. Rhetorical analysis can tell us much about the "Jimmy Carter" which flitters about in the public mind and it can often tell us why voters mentally construct the particular "Jimmy Carters" they do. But no analysis of presidential

discourse is likely to alone uncover the dark secrets of the peanut farmer/ nuclear scientist known as Jimmy Carter of Plains, Georgia.

General Findings

In this brief report, I shall attempt only to sketch out results. More detailed analysis of the data collected will be attempted in the months ahead as I search for a general model capable of explaining presidential communication. Presently, it seems possible to argue that (1) presidential discourse is a somewhat unique rhetorical entity, (2) individual presidents vary considerably from one another on the dimensions tapped here, and (3) some presidents alter their linguistic styles to accommodate changes in time or rhetorical circumstances while others are more habitual. Complete explanation of these results is not yet possible but tentative conclusions will be offered where possible.

Institutional Aspects

Although the peculiarities of our presidents' rhetorical styles have normally occupied the attention of journalists and political pundits, it seems valuable to ask if anything might be said about presidential discourse in general.

Table 1 reveals the overall "shape" of presidential talk. Although some of the variables did not meaningfully discriminate among the types of discourse analyzed, some revealing differences can be noticed:

1. When they speak, presidents bear least resemblance to religious leaders. The latter use what might be called a hortatory style of persuasion. Their's is a rigid, rather "philosophical" type of discourse on the one hand, direct, human and positive on the other. Compared to presidents, religious leaders combine a grassroots vernacular with a clear-cut vision of basic truths. Presumably, their strength of vision is softened a bit by their ability to speak the language of their congregations.

2. Our most recent presidents also differ from the social activists sampled. The activists' rhetorical approach might be termed apocalyptic since it is highly realistic but quite negative as well. Social activists reveal themselves as somewhat self-centered voices crying in the contemporary wilderness, striving to return their fellow citizens to the path of righteousness.

3. The corporation executives whose speaking was analyzed also adopted a distinctive speaking style. Although both presidents and business leaders share executive duties, the latter tend to communicate in a somewhat antiseptic manner. In the analyses conducted here, their remarks are revealed to be quite tentative and somewhat removed from day-to-day realities. They rarely refer to themselves and score low on the human interest dimension as well. Unlike presidents, these businessmen seem to stand well above the fray.

4. It makes sense that presidents would closely resemble the political campaigners. But even here there are differences. The political candidates' style might be termed convoluted since they tend to favor larger words than our presidents and seem to draw upon a richer vocabulary. In addition, the campaigners appear reluctant to inject themselves into their messages. Perhaps it is the case that presidents and campaigners share basic rhetorical instincts, but that running for office requires more artful stylistic dodging then is required of a sitting president.

What, then, might be said of presidential style? Generally, presidents seem to use an accommodationistic style. That is, they steer clear of the rhetorical arrogance of theology, never become as prosaic as the corporation executives in our sample nor as tiresome as the naysaying social activists. By and large, presidents talk with strength but frame their remarks in easily understood language. Rhetorically speaking, the buck does indeed stop with these presidents since they refer to themselves more regularly than do all of the other speakers sampled. In a sense, presidential style is a common-denominator style and is distinguished more by what it is not than by what it is. Because presidents operate partly in a secret world and because they also stand under the klieg lights of national publicity, perhaps they must blunt the rhetorical features which make the other types of discourse distinctive. If there are institutionally based rhetorical forces operating on the presidency, then, they are forces which caution good-hearted moderation and a vocabulary that is easily understood. In a way, the presidency has become democratized--at least rhetorically.

Personal Aspects

When speaking of "presidential style," of course, one is speaking of a pure

abstraction. While it is useful to observe how presidents behave in general, our everyday experience is with particular presidents speaking about particular matters at particular points in time. When we think of presidential discourse we think of the Kennedy glibness or the Johnson "treatment" or the Carter homily. It seems useful, then, to look at our presidents relative to one another, to see how well an empirical analysis of a president's speaking style relates to scholarly or common sensical perceptions. The stylistic portraits revealed in Table 2 are as follows:

1. Truman: Harry Truman's speech patterns are distinguished by three features: (a) he was more rigid than any of the other presidents, (b) he was highly positive and (3) he rarely referred to himself in his public speeches. The impression one receives is that of a somewhat spartan style, a straightforward, here's-where-the-president-stands approach. There is a certain formality here also which, when combined with the pugnaciousness, earmarks Truman as one highly respectful of presidential traditions. The positivity is the one glimpse we get of the up-beat texture of his more informal discourse.

2. Eisenhower: Dwight Eisenhower, it is well known, detested public speaking. He found it unnerving to prepare, much less deliver, a formal address. The warmth and directness many observers felt when speaking to him intimately is not to be found in his prepared remarks. Instead, we find very little "realism," a preference for larger than normal words, a somewhat prolix vocabulary, infrequent self-references and the least "human interest" found among the seven presidents studied. His resulting style might be termed sonorous, perhaps a bit sermonic as well.

3. Kennedy: For all that has been written about the "Kennedy style," relatively little seems to distinguish it (at least when viewed from the particular vantage point of this study). Kennedy tended to be more realistic than his predecessors and less absolute and positive as well, perhaps signalling the emergence of a less avuncular presidential style. Kennedy's most distinctive rhetorical feature is his refusal to recite the litany of Basic American Symbols, a feature which might indicate a distaste for demagoguery. In addition, such an avoidance might help to account for the "cool" image he is said to have projected, especially when compared to the "hotter" images of Truman, Johnson and Nixon.

4. Johnson: Rhetorically at least, if not ideologically, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon had much in common. Johnson's discourse is characterized by a good deal of activity and realism--features which Richard Nixon later accentuated. Johnson was a man of the people linguistically: he specialized in common parlance and

reveled in the basic symbols of the American political tradition. His rhetorical style was simple and dynamic--he clung to basic truths and used them to super-charge his domestic visions. When listening to Lyndon Johnson, one rarely had the feeling that one was listening to a muddle-headed dreamer.

5. Nixon: As I have suggested elsewhere (Hart, 1976), Richard Nixon was a textbook rhetor. Throughout his career, his rhetorical instincts rarely failed him. He was uniquely able to seize upon his listeners' primordial desires and relate them to his own practical ends. The stylistic data collected here reveal Nixon to be the most demagogic of all our recent presidents as well as the most active and realistic. Richard Nixon knew well how to generate a sense of possibility in his listeners. He also knew how to talk their language: he was simpler and tried to exhibit more human interest than any of his presidential contemporaries. While all of this energy cum folksiness may have caused a good many of us to count our change after listening to him, it may also reveal why Richard Nixon was allowed to dominate the political scene in the United States for so many years.

6. Ford: Both critics and admirers of Gerald Ford tended to agree that what one saw in him was pretty much what one got. So, too, rhetorically. Gerry Ford was among the most positive of our modern presidents and the most tentative as well. The resulting image is that of a rather unsure but well-meaning fellow, a person suited for the vestibule of power. Gerry Ford also exhibited a prodigious amount of self-awareness, referring to himself more often than his successor and all of his predecessors. This datum may reveal nothing more than Ford's linguistic habits, a highly personal style of speaking. However, it may show that Ford became the central rhetorical figure during his presidency so that he could capitalize on such an image electorally.

7. Carter: The data presented in Table 2 for Jimmy Carter were gathered exclusively from speeches he delivered during his first year in office. They help to reveal why the National Review (February 3, 1978) claimed that "if Jimmy Carter's first year in office had been a play, it would have closed in New Haven." These data depict the early Carter as passive, tentative, quite non-realistic, rather prolix and with a tendency toward embellishment. Hardly an imperial presidency. Carter's one saving rhetorical grace seems to be his positivity, a feature which the American people continue to appreciate, no matter how poorly they rate his job performance. As if by design, however, Carter seemed to find in his first year almost all of the features which depict one as weak and ineffectual, especially in light of the rhetorical tradition to which he was heir.

Many of the suasory features just described square with popular perceptions of how our presidents have spoken. In other cases, lay observations have failed

us. John Kennedy's style, for example, was not particularly involved linguistically, no matter how much Ted Sorenson is said to have polished it. Dwight Eisenhower did not tend toward demagoguery, even though his career in the military may have prepared him to do so. And Harry Truman was no rustic bumpkin: many stylistic indicators point to his graceful command of language. The value of having available such empirically verifiable stylistic profiles is that they may prove superior to informal observations in explaining why certain presidents received the popular reactions they did. For example, after listening to some columnists, one would be forced to believe that Richard Nixon appealed to an insignificant and foolish segment of humanity. Careful inspection of his speaking style, however, reveals a blend of rhetorical humors capable of enchanting a good many of us.

Developmental Aspects

Table 3 presents information about changes occurring in presidential style across time. The "early modern" presidency (i.e. Truman through Kennedy) is distinguished from the "later modern" presidency in some intriguing ways. One method of explaining the differences might be to acknowledge the essential wisdom of Michael Novak's Choosing Our King (1974) in which he argues that the American people--especially in recent years--have demanded that their president serve them both politically and psychologically. Novak argues that a modern president must be at once prophet and king and that he be chummy (or priestly) to boot. If Novak is correct, perhaps recent presidents have been confronted with a new set of stylistic demands and thus eschewed the rather doctrinaire absolutism of their predecessors as well as the latter's wordy, convoluted and brocaded style. In its stead, recent presidents have substituted a realism suitable for presidential prophecy and a direct, personal approach replete with a good deal of human interest--rather priestly it would seem. Our presidents have become

increasingly self-centered over the years and have resorted to the haven of Basic American Symbols more often than they did previously, all of which may contribute to a suitably majestic style.

Both overall and individually, the presidents did not vary a great deal from the first half to the second half of their administrations. The few significant differences contained in Table 3 are not of great magnitude. If there is any trend in the data it is that the burdens of office may harden presidents and cause them to retreat to an inflexible, somewhat distant manner of speaking. Analyses made of the individual presidents in this regard show this effect to be greatest for Kennedy and Ford. Naturally, we must be careful not to generalize too hastily from this small data base, but the presidency may take its psychological toll upon its inhabitants. Although the differences were not significant in every case, with five out of six of Jimmy Carter's predecessors becoming more rigid and less "humane" during their years in the White House, some of the presidential frustrations described by Buchanan (1978) may be rearing their heads.

To obtain a more refined understanding of how a president's manner of speaking may vary across time, comparisons were made of Richard Nixon as vice-president and as president. In addition, Jimmy Carter's second-year speaking was compared to his maiden year speeches. These results are also included in Table 3.

The Nixon sample is interesting since it might flesh out the rhetorical requirements native to the presidency. For Nixon, at least, the presidency demanded a less frenetic and considerably more concrete style than he had used earlier. Additionally, Nixon's word choices became simpler, less involved and less heavily embellished as president. He also doubled the number of self-references in his messages; whether this results from the centrality of the president to the executive branch of government, from Nixon's desire to personalize his presidency or from galloping megalomania cannot be determined. What does seem clear is that

the presidency caused Nixon to reign in some of the rhetorical habits he had developed as vice-president: his rhetoric became more measured, clearer and more direct, even if less dramatic. Apparently, Nixon's tendency to travel the rhetorical "low road" while serving as Eisenhower's vice-president did not penetrate his presidential style.

The Carter story is also an intriguing one. As mentioned previously, Carter's first year in the White House was regarded by many as a rhetorical disaster. Carter displayed none of Truman's firmness, none of Nixon's dynamism or realism, none of Johnson's lack of affectation. Carter's style was professorial: passive, wordy, weak. The negative reaction to Carter's speaking caused Hamilton Jordan to assert in U.S. News and World Report (May 22, 1978) that, "In the first year or so in office, maybe we were a bit too accommodating. We were the new guys in town and we were trying to get along with everybody. That learning process is over and from now on I think you're going to see the real Jimmy Carter."

Carter's second year in office also brought Gerald Rafshoon to the speechwriting staff who vowed as he joined the team that, "The two things I've always known about Carter are his competence and his toughness. I'd like people to see more of that side." (U.S. News and World Report, July 24, 1978) Table 3 reveals that even Gerald Rafshoon couldn't turn the trick--Carter became neither absolute nor realistic. Instead, he became wordier and more respectful of basic American symbology. Perhaps consequently, perhaps just coincidentally, popular ratings of Carter's job performance got little better in his second year although, again, people seemed to appreciate his friendly and optimistic style.

When Carter's rhetorical development during his third year in office is traced, will we finally notice an increase in "rigid realism?" Will he become responsive to the stylistic preferences of the mass media? Which aspects of his style will remain unchanged and will these invariant features prove to be sensitive

indicies of his basic political personality? Once stylistic data like these are gathered it may be possible to relate any trends noted to such psychologically relevant matters as trust, popularity and perceptions of competence. Long-term analyses of that sort may indicate whether a modern president is merely a manipulandum of the people and their media representatives or whether a president's style is his alone and his forever.

Situational Data

In Table 4 are found rather elementary analyses of three factors which may have some bearing on presidential talk: party, topic and audience. As might be expected with anything as individualistic as a person's speaking style, party affiliation accounts for very few of the differences in stylistic behavior observed. Democrats, it appears, seem to be a bit more willing than Republicans to make themselves the rhetorical center of attention and to make "people" a matter for discussion. Whether such differences emenate from the rival political philosophies found in the two parties or whether they are merely the product of chance is impossible to determine.

Topically, the presidents have adopted a somewhat distinctive style when addressing such value-oriented matters as peace, brotherhood, morality, and human justice. When speaking about these topics, the presidents drew upon a relatively restricted linguistic code, made use of Basic American Symbols with some frequency and generally spoke in a personal, simple and unembellished manner. Such value-oriented speaking, it seems clear, is the favored genre of most presidents primarily because the stock formulas for dealing with these exigences have been so well specified during America's rhetorical history. When speaking about pragmatic matters or strife, on the other hand, our presidents may have no such rhetorical guidebook to consult but must content themselves with the suasory possibilities discoverable *in situ*.

Perhaps the most intriguing data presented in Table 4 is that relating to the audiences addressed by the presidents. If Minow (1973), Cornwell (1974) and, most recently, Barber (1980) are correct, the mass media may have introduced into the presidential equation a new and extremely powerful constant. To test the effects of the mass media upon presidential communications, comparisons were made on each of the eleven variables treated in this study. Only three of the variables failed to reveal differences. The remaining data painted the following picture: when speaking to the American people via radio or television, modern presidents become syntactically convoluted, search for rhetorical effects more insistently and refer to themselves and to human concerns less frequently. In addition, they have a tendency to speak with greater strength but with less realism to mass audiences and they make significantly less rhetorical use of Basic American Symbols in such settings.

These results might well give us pause. With presidents now speaking to national audiences quite often, a New Presidential Style may be developing. This media-inspired argot has none of the directness and warmth found in more personal situations but replaces same with a wordy and rather abstract verbal salad. Apparently, television also frowns on the use of the "hot" Basic American Symbols used in the simpler, typically more emotional, local gatherings. Although the statistical differences observed here are modest ones, the rhetorical clues suggested seem sensible. If there is a New Presidential Style and if it is taking the direction suggested here, the American people may find it necessary to develop a new decoding system appropriate for listening to their media-sensitive chief executives. And if our presidents continue to speak more and more in the rather bloodless patois of the mass media, they may, self-reflexively, dehumanize a traditionally humane institution.

When the speaking patterns of the individual presidents were searched for

audience effects, the media-based influences just noted proved to be strongest for Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Carter. Truman, Eisenhower and Ford also adjusted their remarks to meet media demands but they did so less radically. Topically, the presidents present a much less unified picture. Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon appear to have developed a rather uniform speaking style (not one significant difference was noted among topics for these two speakers). Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter also changed little, although both used a simpler style when speaking on pragmatic matters.

When addressing value-based topics, Harry Truman was more positive and more passive than he was when dealing with policy-oriented issues and also made a special attempt to use Basic American Symbols in the former situations. John Kennedy sharply discriminated among types of speaking situations, using a direct and personal style for practical topics and a more heavily embellished style for axiological matters. Gerald Ford also appeared to be "situationally sensitive" but in a manner quite different from Kennedy. When talking about practical or strife-related issues, Ford tended to be positive, tentative and rather passive, a style which probably made him appear to be "soft" on the issues.

Clearly, the situational data presented here must be treated carefully since the statistical power present in some of the findings is limited. Still, the effects of topic and audience on presidential behavior are obviously matters deserving of serious consideration. Are the mass media deciding when, why and how our presidents talk and, if so, is that good? Why do some presidents adopt a style for all seasons while others are inclined to take their cues from the rhetorical environment? In a simpler era, perhaps, we would not need to concern ourselves with such questions but in an age in which presidents are beseiged by the importunings of numerous and competitive special interest groups, it becomes imperative to wonder who, at root, our presidents are and why they are talking that way.

Summary and Conclusion

As is the case with most studies, this investigation has raised more questions than it has clearly answered. My perspective has been limited. I have examined only one aspect of the presidency--its language--and have inspected only a modest sample of its language at that. Moreover, I have not even studied all facets of presidential language. Important rhetorical resources like imagery, argumentative strategy, intonational features and the like have not been examined at all. The method chosen has also been limited--quantitative analyses of style oftentimes produce bulky or leaden characterizations of language usage. Finally, the elementary statistical tests used have revealed only the grossest features of the rhetorical behavior studied.

It is hoped, however, that the method used here also has something to recommend it. The method is, at least, orderly and treats presidential remarks from a single, consistent perspective. The features of language examined are presumably among the most important predictors of why listeners react to language as they do. By sampling the utterances of several presidents at once, individual styles are better understood; by gathering data systematically (and with appropriate methodological controls), the biases of impressionism are avoided, in part. Finally, by keying exclusively on the micro-stylistic features of presidential language, we have been examining phenomena which most presidents and presidential speechwriters treat as unimportant, it being all but impossible, for example, to monitor the complex of verbs and adverbs which connote absolutism or to consciously match the positivity of today's speech to that of last week's. Thus, our method is not without its attractions.

The main value of any methodological approach, of course, lies in its ability to unearth something important. The data gathered here about presidential style suggest that institutional, personal, developmental and situational forces conspire

to determine how a president says what he says. Institutionally, we have seen that other types of discourse differ considerably from the presidential. Although they are leaders, presidents do not quite talk like corporate executives. Although they adhere to particular philosophies and often advocate specific changes in national policy, our presidents are not quite clergymen or social reformers. Presidents seem to blend a number of different rhetorical features in their discourse and certain of them behave in highly distinctive ways. Some, like Harry Truman, are sure of themselves while others, like Gerry Ford, are quite tentative. Some presidents like Dwight Eisenhower are rather formal when they speak in public while others, like Jimmy Carter, are more personal. Lyndon Johnson's activity, Richard Nixon's realism and John Kennedy's emotional reserve are also part of the modern presidency.

Rhetorically, the presidency may be changing. Recently, the presidents substituted for the old assuredness and diffidence a more congenial and less ornate rhetorical style. Individual presidents have made individualistic adaptations. Richard Nixon changed to meet the demands of his new presidency while Jimmy Carter made only cosmetic changes between his first and second years. Dwight Eisenhower modified his style not at all, resolutely maintaining his rhetorical posture no matter which audience, topic or temporal change confronted him. All of the presidents made accommodations for electronically mediated audiences, however. While the data assembled here are only partially instructive about these alterations, modern presidents may be developing split rhetorical personalities: one firm and cool, suitable for television; the other simple and direct, appropriate for the hustings. What such adaptations may presage for the psychological wholeness of our presidents can only be imagined.

Despite the data gathered, we still do not yet know <u>why</u> our presidents speak as they do. Is a president an empty psychological receptor, ready to be fitted

with a new rhetorical persona on inauguration day? Are our presidents' remarks simply the product of a mechanized process guided by a gaggle of wordsmiths? Or do our presidents' speeches contain aspects of their essential selves? Indeed, do presidents even have "essential selves" after dashing hither and yon for four or more years trying to serve all of the audiences and media demands and myriad conflictual issues presented to them? If we had our choices about such matters, how would we like our presidents to speak? Are we heartened, for example, that Gerry Ford saw fit to refer to himself three times more often than Harry Truman? Are we happy that Richard Nixon was infinitely more realistic than Dwight Eisenhower? Did John Kennedy's intricate and patterned adaptations help us to know him better? While our knowledge of presidential discourse only allows us to ask, rather than answer, such questions at the moment, these questions will become increasingly important in a media-dominated age, which is to say, a rhetorically dense age. In such an era it seems patently unlikely that we will truly understand our presidency until we reckon discerningly with how our presidents talk.

TABLE 1

INSTITUTIONAL CORRELATES OF PRESIDENTIAL STYLE

	Presidents	Corporation Executives	Social Activists	Political Campaigners	Religious Leaders	F
COMPOUND VARIABLES						
Activity	105.3	108.2	102.5	103.3	104.6	0.67
Realism	93.5	80.3	97.9	96.4	89.4	3.51***
Absolutism	105.8	95.9	99.1	107.0	109.6	2.64**
Positivity	121.8	121.7	113.0	119.8	123.6	1.91*
SIMPLE VARIABLES						
Word Size	4.60	5.34	5.51	5.31	5.61	94.83***
Lexical Diversity	.487	.508	.504	.503	.486	7.14***
Self Awareness	7.23	4.78	6.88	5.25	5.85	2.92**
Simplicity	102.0	103.4	104.9	102.3	110.3	15.70***
Human Interest	34.3	27.2	33.2	33.0	37.1	6.13***
Embellishment	.637	.603	.505	.592	.603	0.65
NO. OF CASES	266	50	50	129	160	--

***p<.01
**p<.05
*p<.10

TABLE 2

PERSONALITY CORRELATES OF PRESIDENTIAL STYLE

	Truman	Eisenhower	Kennedy	Johnson	Nixon	Ford	Carter (First year)	F
COMPOUND VARIABLES								
Activity	106.6	101.4	104.9	110.6	116.6	104.9	90.9	3.62***
Realism	92.1	77.4	98.1	100.5	111.2	87.9	77.8	6.35***
Absolutism	120.4	109.6	106.9	104.9	113.6	89.1	95.9	4.76***
Positivity	126.9	121.0	109.4	121.3	117.3	126.5	128.1	2.66**
SIMPLE VARIABLES								
Word Size	4.63	4.73	4.58	4.46	4.52	4.65	5.44	33.51***
Lexical Diversity	.480	.504	.493	.489	.453	.502	.478	8.75***
Self Awareness	3.97	4.66	4.69	7.68	10.05	12.89	10.42	10.19***
Simplicity	107.9	98.2	102.4	97.1	109.1	97.7	102.8	8.62***
Human Interest	31.4	29.6	30.7	37.1	39.8	38.2	37.8	4.60***
Embellishment	.731	.653	.705	.556	.444	.719	.813	1.78*
BASIC AMERICAN SYMBOLS	4.50	2.97	2.21	5.08	6.79	4.02	4.10	4.36***
NO. OF CASES	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	--

*** $p < .01$
** $p < .05$
* $p < .10$

TABLE 3

DEVELOPMENTAL CORRELATES OF PRESIDENTIAL STYLE

	Presidential Era			Time During Administration			Richard Nixon			Jimmy Carter		
	Early Modern	Later Modern	t	First Half	Second Half	t	Vice-Prexy	President	t	First year	Second year	t
COMPOUND VARIABLES												
Activity	104.0	106.3	0.69	109.2	105.3	1.18*	116.6	103.5	2.44***	90.9	97.5	0.71
Realism	89.6	96.4	1.76**	93.5	97.6	0.95	111.2	140.7	2.46***	77.8	79.8	0.26
Absolutism	112.3	100.8	3.00***	104.2	110.7	1.55*	113.6	107.8	0.89	95.9	91.7	0.55
Positivity	119.7	123.2	1.09	122.1	119.2	0.84	117.3	116.2	0.19	128.1	122.9	0.76
SIMPLE VARIABLES												
Word Size	4.64	4.55	2.38***	4.61	4.58	0.64	4.73	4.53	3.71***	5.44	5.80	3.06***
Lexical Diversity	.493	.481	2.05**	.488	.486	0.42	.489	.453	3.71***	.479	.503	3.94***
Self Awareness	4.43	10.08	6.85***	8.51	***5.92	2.03***	5.06	10.05	3.29***	10.04	10.01	0.12
Simplicity	102.8	101.2	1.09	101.4	102.7	0.91	103.3	109.1	2.46**	102.8	102.7	0.02
Human Interest	30.6	38.3	5.05***	35.7	33.1	1.60**	37.6	39.7	0.74	37.8	36.3	0.45
Embellishment	.696	.576	1.81**	.608	.665	0.86	.540	.444	1.22*	.813	.838	0.11
BASIC AMERICAN SYMBOLS	3.22	4.99	3.32***	4.28	4.24	0.06	6.35	6.78	0.31	4.10	6.05	1.99**
NO. OF CASES	114	152	--	114	114	--	29	38	--	38	38	--

***p<.01
**p<.05
*p<.10

TABLE 4

SITUATIONAL CORRELATES OF PRESIDENTIAL STYLE

	Party Affiliation			Audience Addressed			Topic Discussed			
	Republican	Democrat	t	National	Local	t	Pragmatics	Values	Strife	F
COMPOUND VARIABLES										
Activity	103.9	107.2	1.03	106.8	104.1	0.82	104.8	106.0	105.0	0.06
Realism	93.1	93.9	0.20	90.3	95.9	1.41*	94.0	92.0	95.8	0.23
Absolutism	107.0	104.1	0.75	108.4	103.7	1.24*	103.3	105.5	112.9	1.49
Positivity	121.9	121.6	0.07	122.5	121.1	0.45	122.5	112.5	126.7	1.43
SIMPLE VARIABLES										
Word Size	4.55	4.64	2.20***	4.75	4.63	2.48***	4.66	4.68	4.82	2.55*
Lexical Diversity	.487	.486	0.15	.490	.480	1.87**	.491	.479	.486	2.56*
Self-Awareness	5.44	9.05	4.13***	6.54	9.30	3.00***	7.33	9.53	5.17	6.18***
Simplicity	102.4	101.6	0.58	100.6	104.0	2.55***	100.1	104.3	102.4	3.79**
Human Interest	33.1	35.7	1.67**	33.0	37.4	2.83***	35.7	35.4	31.9	1.71
Embellishment	.663	.609	0.82	.641	.669	0.40	.742	.527	.696	4.14**
BASIC AMERICAN SYMBOLS	3.97	4.59	1.08	3.70	5.21	2.92**	3.82	5.08	3.77	3.03**
No. OF CASES	114	152	--	146	120	--	118	100	48	--

*** p<.01
** p<.05
* p<.10

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